DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 060 FL 021 366

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TITLE Late Hebrew Immersion at Mt. Scopus College, Melbourne: Towards Complete Hebrew Fluency for Jewish Day School Students.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 31p.; For serial publication in which this article appears, see FL 021 365.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Language and Language Education: Working Papers of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia; v2 n1 p1-29 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Day Schools; Foreign Countries; *Hebrew; *Immersion Programs; Jews; Junior High Schools; Junior High School Students; *Language Fluency; Parent Attitudes; Program Design; *Program Evaluation; Student Attitudes; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS *Mount Scopus College (Australia)

ABSTRACT

This paper describes and evaluates a Hebrew immersion program for Jewish day school students at Mt. Scopus College in Melbourne, Australia. Specific sections address the following: (1) the first year; (2) the second year; (3) designing the evaluation of the program; (4) results of the evaluation (including academic outcomes, student and parent attitudes); (5) communicating the information in the evaluations; (6) significance of the evaluation findings; and (7) implications for practitioners. It is suggested that although it is too early to predict what the ultimate outcomes of the evaluation will be, the preliminary findings are promising, and the opportunities for further positive effects are considerable. (Contains 20 references.) (JL)

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Late Hebrew Immersion at Mt. Scopus College, Melbourne: Towards Complete Hebrew Fluency for Jewish Day School Students

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LATE HEBREW IMMERSION AT MOUNT SCOPUS COLLEGE, MELBOURNE: TOWARDS COMPLETE HEBREW FLUENCY FOR JEWISH DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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In February 1990, Mount Scopus College launched a late partial (70%) immersion program in Hebrew. Initially, 25 Year 7 students enrolled in the class, and, as 24 of them moved on to Year 8, they were joined at the start of this year by a new intake of 23 Year 7 students. Thus, approximately 50 Mount Scopus students are currently studying the majority of their school subjects in Hebrew: mathematics, science, history, geography, social education, computer science, drama, and pastoral care lessons, in addition of course, to Hebrew and Jewish Studies subjects *per se*. The only subjects which these students are studying in which Hebrew is not the language of instruction are English, a third language (French, Japanese, or Yiddish), art, music, and physical education.

To set the context in which this immersion program is located, it is necessary to digress briefly and to describe Mount Scopus College. Mount Scopus is a large, traditional community Jewish day school in suburban Melbourne, Australia, with an enrolment of 2400 students from pre-school to Year 12. It comprises 6-8 classes of 25-30 students at each year level, one of which, at each of Years 7 and 8, is an immersion class. It is one of nine Jewish day schools (covering the entire ideological spectrum, from haredi to Bundist) in Melbourne with a total combined enrolment of 5400, serving a Jewish community of 45,000.

In terms of its educational program, Mount Scopus has

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always been modern Orthodox and Zionist in orientation, with a strong emphasis on Hebrew language teaching, but the Hebrew focus has been intensified in recent years, e.g., with the introduction of an *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policy for all classes (1986) and the adoption of the *Madregot* language text series in preference to *Hebrew and Heritage* (1987). Some significant innovations have also taken place in staffing patterns for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, with the strengthening of the recruitment and orientation program for prospective shlichim (1988) and the commencement of a studentship program (1989) to train aspiring local Jewish Studies teachers (Mount Scopus graduates, in the main). While no formal study of the effects of these changes on the Hebrew language proficiency or the Jewish identity of Mount Scopus students has been attempted, there is some informal and anecdotal evidence (performance in Year 12 matriculation examinations in Hebrew and Jewish Studies, rates of enrolment in tertiary Jewish Studies courses, rates of participation in Jewish life on university campuses) that suggests that at least some of these, and other, initiatives in the Hebrew and Jewish Studies areas are having a generally positive effect.

Although the Jewish educational program of the school can be appropriately characterized as modern Orthodox, the segment of the Jewish population of Melbourne which Mount Scopus College serves, cannot. In fact, only a very small proportion of the students and families affiliated with Mount Scopus are religiously observant along modern Orthodox lines as measured by any of the standard criteria of Orthodox practice, e.g., Shabbat and kashrut observance. Typically, Mount Scopus students are not regular synagogue-goers, although many will attend synagogue services on occasion, up to several times a year. Therefore, although the Hebrew language functions as an active cultural and religious value in the communities served by quite a few Jewish schools around the world (and in those schools Hebrew proficiency may be perceived as a key to participation in some of the most highly valued activities and experiences available within the Jewish community), such is not the case at Mount Scopus. Rather, at Mount Scopus Hebrew appears to function for those segments

within a very diverse school community who do value it, more as an abstract cultural value than as a direct and immediate means to a desired cultural end, and certainly not as a sought-after end in itself.

This, then, is the setting in which Hebrew immersion was introduced: a large community school in a location in which well over half the Jewish population send their children to Jewish day schools, a school serving a community possessing at best, only moderate commitment to Jewish culture and tradition, a school in which Hebrew teaching and learning had been actively promoted in a number of ways in the years preceding the introduction of a first immersion class.

THE GENESIS OF A HEBREW IMMERSION PROGRAM

In late 1987, Alan Hoffman of the Melton Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora, arranged for one of the authors of the paper to meet with Professor Andrew Cohen of the Hebrew University School of Education. Cohen was also a member of the project team of the first immersion program in the United States (a Spanish immersion project in Culver City, California), and he encouraged the author to investigate immersion as a possible strategy for extending the Hebrew proficiency of students at Mount Scopus to unprecedented levels.

Armed with a brief bibliography, the author returned to Melbourne and presented the concept of immersion to the Headmaster of the Primary School and to the Education Sub-committee of the Board of Governors. The proposed immersion program continued as a topic of discussion and investigation for a half year, during which time the views of staff members were canvassed and local and overseas authorities on early childhood education and first and second-language acquisition were consulted. In the end, there was widespread concern that the language development and the psycho-social development of three-year-olds (the age at which the Mount Scopus pre-school commences) who were exposed to an immersion program could be placed at risk, and the proposal was consequently set aside.

Later in 1988, the same author came across one of the authoritative reviews of research on immersion (Genesee, 1987), and discovered upon reading it that immersion was possible at times and ages other than the commencement of formal schooling. In fact, there are three varieties of immersion: early, delayed (or middle), and late, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Early immersion was the model that Mount Scopus had already considered and rejected. However, delayed immersion, commencing around Year 4, has the advantage of not introducing a heavy concentration on a second language until after the child's first-language skills are already firmly established; and late immersion, beginning at or about Year 7, has the additional benefit of the students actively opting for it and therefore feeling more strongly committed and motivated to succeed. The matter was again raised with the Education Committee, and the late-immersion model was focused on as the most promising alternative.

This time, the Educaton Committee insisted on an even more extensive study and investigation of late Hebrew immersion, apparently as a reaction to their earlier research into and rejection of early immersion. Beginning in March 1989, the author conducted a feasibility study, individually interviewing the parents of 23 Year 6 students who had been identified on the basis of general academic competence and Hebrew proficiency as more likely than the average student to be interested in a challenging enrichment program like Hebrew immersion. Group meetings were also held with the children of parents who had expressed some interest. Parents and students were assured that the program would be monitored very closely both by the school staff and by a team of academics, that the curriculum would be identical, for all intents and purposes, to the educational program of the other Year 7 classes, and that, after a brief lag in their rate of progress through the curriculum, students would catch up, if not by the end of Year 7, then early in Year 8. They were warned, however, that the program was likely to place increased academic demands on them, that students should expect to experience difficulties and frustration in the first few months of the program, and that, if they

chose to enrol in the class, they needed to be committed to persevering in spite of the difficulties. By mid-July, commitments to enroll in the immersion class had been secured from 14 students and their parents from this initial group.

At the same time, approximately 12 teachers were approached and their interest in teaching in an immersion setting was gauged. Eventually, a team of five teachers was selected to share the teaching of subjects being offered in Hebrew. Local and overseas language experts were again contacted, their comments on particular concerns that had been raised (relating to identification and/or adaptation of curriculum materials and teaching aids, and the limited competence in language production in particular of beginning immersion students) were invited, and their commitment to assist the teaching staff in recruiting parents and students, in monitoring and evaluating student progress, and in providing for the teachers' professional development was sought and received.

Various policy issues were considered by the Education Committee, and the following five aims of immersion at Mount Scopus were agreed upon:

1. To provide an appropriate challenge for able students.
2. To develop in students near-native proficiency in Hebrew.
3. To develop in students positive attitudes toward language learning, Hebrew study, native Hebrew speakers, and a stronger identification with Hebrew-based culture.
4. To overcome one of the main hurdles to serious study of Jewish sources in the original (namely, lack of language proficiency), so that Jewish study can proceed at a quantitatively and qualitatively superior level.
5. To enable students to study an externally set curriculum (the Bechinah Yerushalmit) and gain

> advanced standing at the Hebrew University and possbly at local tertiary institutions as well.
>
> (Mount Scopus College, 1989).

Eventually, after these and several other concerns had been put to rest, the Education Committee and Board of Governors authorized a general approach to all Year 6 parents inviting their expressions of interest in the bilingual class (due to concerns with the harshness of the name "immersion program", the name was changed. Similar rhetorical sensitivity was shown in a number of other instances: "research" became "evaluation", "experimental group" became "bilingual group", "control group" became "comparison group", and so on). In an attempt to ensure the success of the program, students who were below average either in general academic performance or in Hebrew proficiency were discouraged from participating. While it was believed that students of average or above-average ability were likely to thrive in an enriched bilingual setting, and in spite of research evidence favoring the enrolment of students of low intellectual ability in immersion programs in Canada, the Education Committee recommended that the Mount Scopus program be open to most, though not all entering Year 7 students. In practice, of the 26 inquiries about the program that were made, only two were on behalf of students whose potential participation in the bilingual class could have been called into question: one student was significantly weaker in Hebrew proficiency and motivation than the other interested students, and another had a history of serious emotional distress in response to academically stressful situations. Following discussions with the student and the parents in each case, they decided not to pursue their initial interest in the program.

By the end of August, 24 students and their parents had made a formal commitment to join the bilingual class (they were joined by a 25th student who decided to enrol in the class only toward the end of the year). As well, an information session on the proposed bilingual class was held for all teachers in the secondary school, and concerns that they expressed were addressed and resolved.

In September, one of the authors and the teacher who had agreed to be the coordinator of the program travelled together to Canada to see immersion programs there in action and to speak to students, teachers, administrators, consultants, and academics involved in immersion. All in all, five cities were visited, and over 40 classes in 13 schools were observed in session. The visit reinforced the confidence of parents, students, teachers, and Education Committee and Board members at Mount Scopus that immersion could be successful and that, in fact, some of the features that had been built into the Mount Scopus bilingual approach were likely to be a source of great strength, even in comparison to some of the better-established immersion programs in Canada. With internal resistance toward the bilingual class neutralized, planning intensified towards the opening of the first bilingual class, particularly in terms of the selection of curriculum materials and syllabus planning on the part of each of the five teachers.

THE FIRST YEAR : FIELD NOTES

To the pleasant surprise of students, teachers, and parents alike, the year began on a high note. Teachers were impressed with the ability of students to function in Hebrew virtually throughout the day, students surprised themselves with their own abilities, and parents reported that their children were happy and well-motivated at home. Within a month of the start of the year, teachers noted the considerable progress students had already made in their fluency of speech and in their self-confidence in using Hebrew in a variety of settings.

Shortly thereafter, however, the difficulties that had been predicted materialized. Students began to complain about an excessive work load; teachers expressed frustration that students were not able to function more independently in Hebrew yet, particularly in reading passages of subject matter, even when it had been rewritten and simplified; and parents in particular complained about their children being continuously fatigued. Concern was also expressed that the bilingual class was falling behind other classes

in their coverage of the syllabus. In short, the problems that had been predicted were coming to fruition, although only after a brief period of euphoria that had lulled the bilingual program participants into a false sense of security. Specific issues raised by students and parents were addressed to the extent possible, and all concerned were reminded that difficulties of this sort had been anticipated and presented well in advance and that it was only a matter of a few months before students would emerge from this feeling of crisis.

Sure enough, by the end of the first semester in June, nearly all of the students had regained their equilibrium and their positive attitude towards their bilingual class experience. However, two students did leave the class during these difficult months, but their departure was partially offset by an additional student who transferred in. The remaining 24 students are the same group that continued on to Year 8 at the start of this year and remain happily enrolled in the program.

For the students, the latter half of the first year was marked by accelerating progress in each of the academic areas and by the continuing development of increased Hebrew proficiency both in terms of facility and accuracy. Contact with parents continued on a regular, almost monthly basis, and they too expressed increasing satisfaction with the program as their children's confidence, and their own, was restored. The students truly regained their confidence quickly; in fact, just about the only negative feature of the entire second semester was, as the teachers reported, an unhealthy sense of pride, bordering on superiority, that the students as a group began to feel. Considerable time was spent in program staff meetings discussing how best to moderate the students' rapidly improving self-concept, and mechanech lessons and group guidance sessions were devoted to this issue. All in all, however, the year ended on a very positive note.

THE SECOND YEAR : EARLY IMPRESSIONS

As noted previously, a new bilingual group of 23 incoming Year 7 students entered the program at the start of 1991. Their

experience, to date, has proceeded more smoothly, with less volatile shifts in attitude than characterized the first intake group last year. While it is too early to reach any conclusions or to draw any inferences, we believe that the calmer response from students and parents to date may at least partly be a function of the lessons learned by the teachers from last year's experience and their concerted efforts to promote an atmosphere of calm acceptance of the periodic ups and downs associated with this program. This explanation is supported by the *mechanechet* (who is also the Jewish Studies teacher) of the present Year 7 group, who reports that, "as a result of the 1990 experience of the bilingual students having such high self-esteem, we specifically played down this point with the current Year 7's, and they do not have the feeling of superiority as experienced with the first group." (Figdor, 1991) It may also be the case that, having seen one group of students already complete Year 7 successfully, the new group of Year 7 students and parents are less anxious and more controlled in their reactions.

Teachers report that by mid-year, most of the Year 7 students automatically communicate with them in Hebrew both in and out of the classroom. They take it as an expectation that they are to converse in Hebrew with their bilingual teachers in both formal and informal settings. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that students feel confident enough to speak for an extended period of time in front of the class. However, they continue to experience difficulty in reading material in Hebrew not specifically prepared or rewritten for them. This prevents teachers in a number of subject areas from using a standard Israeli textbook for the class and imposes on teachers the additional requirement of preparing booklets and worksheets that adapt the language of Israeli textbooks to the students' reading level. A significant exception to this rule is the Hebrew language class, where the main textbook used is the Grade 4 volume of the *Mifgashim* series.

The Year 8 group also continues to progress well in all areas. At this stage, their Hebrew language skills are quite strong, and they are able to cope with tasks involving demands of increasing

complexity that more closely approximate those appropriate to native language speakers of their age with each passing week.

For example, the teacher who has taught them Hebrew in both Year 7 and Year 8, and who is also their *mechanechet*, reports that the students have made great strides in their listening skills:

> "I cannot forget my first minutes with the class in Year 7 when I began speaking to them and they repeatedly asked me if I could speak more slowly.... This year, I talk at my natural, rapid rate, and there is practically never a situation in which the students don't understand me or ask me to repeat myself."
>
> (Malka, 1991)

Similar progress has been recorded in the students' speaking abilities:

> "In their Hebrew lessons, the students are required to speak about interesting things that happened the previous evening or weekend, and the like. Last year, they found it difficult to produce a complete sentence in Hebrew without sneaking a word of English in, or without getting stuck in the middle and not being able to extricate themselves. Now, the sentences are fluent, using good syntax and without English, the speed with which they speak has increased, and it is simply a pleasure to hear children in the Diaspora speaking so well."

The written expression of the Year 8 students has also progressed over the past 18 months:

> "As opposed to last year, it is much easier to understand and mark their written work. At first, their essays were filled with errors in spelling, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. There was hardly a sentence without an error. The improvement since then is unbelievable:

> complete compositions are submitted with hardly any errors."
>
> "The length of their compositions and of their answers to essay questions in tests has also changed markedly. Before, as it was difficult for them to express themselves, they limited themselves to a few short lines, whereas today, they go beyond the prescribed length of response, continuing their answers on the reverse side of test papers."

Based on the teachers' perceptions, the Hebrew language progress that the students have made must be considered a source of great satisfaction. Even the students appreciate and make good use of the proficiency they have developed, often, for example, speaking to each other in Hebrew over the telephone so that their parents won't understand them. Two students have even reported that they've had dreams in Hebrew.

All in all, the view from the field suggests that the bilingual program has been remarkably successful, a conclusion that, as we shall see shortly, is strongly supported by the preliminary findings of the program evaluation that has monitored the progress of the bilingual classes since the time the students first enrolled near the end of Year 6.

In the next part of the paper, the work of the evaluating team will be described. The underlying philosophy and design of the evaluation will be discussed, and the data collected and analyzed so far will be summarized.

The work in this section is the result of collaboration by researchers from two Centres of the National Languages & Literacy Institute of Australia, the Language Testing Centre at the University of Melbourne (Dr. Tim McNamara) and the Language and Society Centre at Monash University, Melbourne (Dr. Edina Eisikovits). Each Centre has received funding from the Australian Government to carry out the evaluation so far, an indication of the national interest in this, the most far-reaching and carefully undertaken immersion program so far attempted in Australia.

DESIGNING THE EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

When thinking about the design of the evaluation at the beginning of the project, we began with the evaluations of the Canadian immersion programs on which the Mount Scopus program was modelled. Evaluations of these programs have been amply documented, beginning with the well-known book of Lambert and Tucker (1972) on the original St. Lambert programs. Swain and Lapkin (1982) summarize a number of others. Typically, the design of the evaluations is based on a conception of the evaluation as a report on an experiment in the scientific sense, the purpose of which is to establish the success or otherwise of an instance of educational change. The methods, concepts and terms used in the evaluation are drawn from scientific experiments, with 'experimental' and 'control' groups, the need to control variables, and a focus on outcomes. As with all experiments, there is a concern to establish the generalizability of the findings of a particular experiment, that is, the reproducibility of the outcomes in other similar (educational) settings.

The main features of the design of the Canadian evaluations are as follows:

a) Establishment of equivalent bilingual and comparison groups using IQ (and sometimes age) as the variable(s).
b) Testing the bilingual and comparison groups at the beginning of the program and at the end of each year, and comparing the results statistically.
c) Repeating the procedure for successive cohorts of students each year.

The design is intended to enable the researcher to address questions such as the following, which are among those listed by Swain and Lapkin (1982: 16-23):

1. What happens to the development of students' first language (English) skills?

2. Do the immersion students learn more French than students in a core French program? How does their French compare to that of native speakers of French?
3. Are the immersion students able to keep up with their English-educated peers in subject content taught to them in French?
4. Does participation in the immersion program hinder general intellectual or cognitive growth?

...

7. What are the social and psychological consequences of participation in the immersion programs?

However, it was realized that the standard Canadian approach had begun to attract a good deal of criticism on account of its exclusive focus on outcomes, exemplifying as it does a product-oriented approach (Brown, 1989: 224-225; Long, 1984). Criticism of such approaches has been expressed for some time in the general literature on the evaluation of educational programs (e.g., Cronbach, 1982; Cronbach et al. 1980), and more recently it has featured in discussions of the evaluation of foreign language programs specifically (e.g. Mitchell, 1988 and Beretta, 1990, who comments on the lack of data on the process of implementation in the Canadian programmes and the 'almost exclusive concern with outcomes'.[1])

Two main kinds of argument have been advanced in favor of attention to processes. The first, represented by Long (1984), accepts that evaluations are experiments, and argues that observation of processes is required to ensure what is called the internal validity of the experiment; that is, that what you claim is going on in the experimental and control classrooms is actually what is going on there. In other words, you are attempting to guarantee that the methods you are contrasting actually differ in the way you claim they do. Examples of threats to internal validity in the present context would be if it turned out that one or more of the teachers was using a great deal of English in the immersion

class. Note that this concern with process is within the experimental paradigm, and represents an attempt to carry out this kind of experiment more rigorously.

However, there is a second, more powerful and radical line of attack which questions the whole notion that evaluations can be conceptualized as experiments. This position is well expressed by Cronbach (1980; 1982) who, like Luther, nailed his 95 theses to the door of the established evaluation church. Here are one or two of the theses (Cronbach et al. 1980: 5-11):

30. It is unwise for evaluation to focus on whether a project has 'attained its goals'.
56. Results of a program evaluation are so dependent on the setting that replication is only a figure of speech; the evaluator is essentially an historian.
94. Those who shape policy should reach their decisions with their eyes open; it is the evaluator's task to illuminate the situation, not to dictate the decision.
95. Scientific quality is not the principal standard; an evaluation should aim to be comprehensible, correct and complete, and credible to partisans on all sides.

The philosophy of the evaluation of the Mount Scopus program basically adopts Cronbach's position and broadly reflects his view of evaluation as history, not science.

Central to Cronbach's view is the notion of the policy shaping community (PSC). For him, evaluation is part of and at its best informs an essentially political process of decision-making. Those with particular interests in the PSC are stakeholders. It is to the stakeholders that the evaluation is addressed, not merely the research community (who in this sense are simply one of the stakeholders).

In the case of the Mount Scopus evaluation, the policy-shaping community includes those at the local (i.e., school) level

and at the national level (funding for the evaluation comes from the Australian government). At the school level, policy decisions include: Should the school continue to run this program? Should extra resources be set aside for this program? Should I as a parent allow/encourage my child to participate in the program? At the national level, policy decisions include: should programs of this type be extended to other schools and other languages in the Australian context?

The design of the evaluation attempts to provide relevant information so that the members of the policy-shaping community can be assisted in reaching decisions about some of these questions.

In the design of the Mount Scopus evaluation, some of the features of the Canadian evaluations were in fact preserved, because the stakeholders had a legitimate concern about outcomes. For example, parents wished to know that their children were not suffering obvious disadvantage from the program; this aspect of the evaluation acted as a sort of safety net for them. The school and the parents were interested to know about the effects of the program on the students' attitudes to various aspects of their Jewish identity. However, the Canadian design was supplemented by additional research on the social context of the program and by attention to implementation processes, with the result that the main features of the Mount Scopus evaluation are as follows:

1. The establishment of a comparison group to enable comparisons to be made about the academic progress of students in the program with children in regular classes, and to investigate changes in attitudes associated with participation in the program.
2. Questionnaire survey of parents and children in the bilingual group, focusing on sociolinguistic questions and attitudes to Hebrew and English.
3. Observation of classes in the bilingual group.
4. Recording, transcription and analysis of classroom language in the bilingual classes.

5. Interviews with teachers in the program.
6. Case studies of a number of students in the program.
7. Interviews with selected families in the program.
8. Attendance at meetings with parents, staff meetings, school policy meetings, etc.
9. Examination of records - lesson plans, mark books, reports, etc.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION TO DATE

Academic Outcomes

The children entering the Bilingual Class in 1990 and a larger group of students in other Year 6 classes who had performed at comparable levels in routine scholarship testing in 1989, were tested on standardized tests of IQ, reading and maths, and on a Hebrew language proficiency test devised by Elana Shohamy for the Melton Center.

From the larger pool, the members of the final comparison group were chosen on the basis of results on these tests. There were

		BILINGUAL	COMPARISON	t	p
IQ	X	121.96	121.24	.25	.80
	s	9.65	10.06		
MATHEMATICS	X	46.24	44.72	.82	.42
	s	6.75	6.36		
READING	X	27.25	26.75	.21	.83
	s	8.73	7.49		
HEBREW	X	59.54	58.68	.44	.66
	s	6.65	6.90		

Table 1 ***Results of t-tests on four comparison variables, Bilingual and Comparison groups, 1990 cohort, beginning of program***

13 girls and 12 boys in the comparison group, fairly closely matching the gender distribution in the Bilingual Class. The groups were found to be matched on each of the four variables, on the basis of t-tests (cf. Table 1).

A similar procedure has been carried out in 1991 for the creation of a comparison group for the new cohort of students.

The purpose of the creation of the comparison group is to investigate the performance of the students in the Bilingual Class on a number of outcome measures in relation to the performance of a comparable group of students in other classes which are not being taught by the bilingual method.

Results for the 1990 cohort at the end of the first year of the program are reported in Table 2. The Bilingual and Comparison groups were tested on standardized tests of English (reading comprehension) and mathematics, and the Hebrew proficiency test was readministered. The results show that the group scores for math and reading between the two groups are indistinguishable, whereas there is a highly significant difference between the two groups in terms of Hebrew proficiency.

		BILINGUAL	COMPARISON	t	p
MATHEMATICS	X	42.23	43.12	.55	.59
	s	5.04	5.99		
READING	X	29.35	28.62	.31	.76
	s	8.36	7.77		
HEBREW	X	168.3	138.7	6.89	.00
	S	12.1	17.0		

Table 2 *Results of t-tests on three comparison variables, Bilingual and Comparison groups, 1990 cohort, end of first year of program*

ATTITUDES

The evaluation has also focused on the personal and social background of the students and their families, by means of an

attitude questionnaire for students and a parental questionnaire (in addition to the interviews with parents and students mentioned above). Data from the questionnaires have been partially analyzed to date.

Student Attitudes

The questionnaire had the following sections[2] :

1. demographic information (gender, age, age at entry to the College, languages known and used)
2. attitudes to languages in general
3. self-evaluation of Hebrew language skills
4. attitudes to Israel and Israelis
5. motivation for learning Hebrew
6. attitudes to learning Hebrew
7. language learning strategies and behaviour.

It was administered to the first cohort of both the Bilingual and Comparison groups in December 1989 (prior to entry) and will be readministered at exit.

Overall, relatively few significant differences were found between the groups. There were none in sections 1 and 2 (thus importantly for interpreting outcome measures, the groups were at least initially equivalent in their prior and current language input outside the school). In section 3, there were differences in relation to only 2 of 29 specific skills in Hebrew, and no differences overall, the self-assessment thereby proving to be in line with the students' real abilities in that the groups were matched on performance on the Hebrew proficiency test.

There were no significant differences between the groups on any of the items in Sections 4 and 5, or overall for those sections. The reasons for studying Hebrew given most support by the Bilingual class students focused on the communicative function of Hebrew and its symbolic function as a heritage language (these provide an interesting contrast with the motivation of parents: see

below). Reasons to do with professional and academic advancement, mental training or the facilitation of prayer received least support. Significant differences were found between the groups on Sections 6 and 7 overall, with the Bilingual group (not surprisingly) registering the more positive attitudes.

We have attempted to investigate the relationship between responses on the attitudinal measures and achievement in Hebrew in the Bilingual class, but have been frustrated by ceiling effects for the Bilingual group on the Hebrew proficiency test administered at the end of the first year of the program.

Parental Attitudes

Parents of students in the Bilingual group were given a questionnaire investigating personal background, language background, proficiency in Hebrew and English and motivation for placing children in the Bilingual program. The responses to the questions on motivation have been investigated as part of an M.A. thesis (Segan, 1991). Parents were asked to rate the importance of a number of reasons in their decision to encourage their children to join the Bilingual program. 'Educational challenge' and 'My child is a high achiever' were rated most highly overall. 'Jewish identity' was perceived as of moderate importance, while 'Religious reasons' were notable as the lowest motivating factor, only 1 in 6 parents rating this reason as 'important' in their choice.

Of the 46 parents who completed the questionnaire, 35 had Hebrew speaking relatives, yet the reason 'By participating in the program, my child will be able to speak to Hebrew speaking relatives' was one of the lowest motivating factors.

Segan found highly significant differences between the responses of those parents with Hebrew speaking relatives and those without, the latter rating several of the possible motivating factors significantly more highly (i.e. closer to 'extremely important') than the former. Those with Hebrew speaking relatives show strong instrumental motivation (reasons to do with educational challenge), whereas those without show additional

motivation in terms of the symbolic and communicative function of Hebrew. The significance of this finding is a little unclear until other background details of the two sets of parents (e.g., their degree of religious affiliation, etc.) have been investigated.

COMMUNICATING THE INFORMATION IN THE EVALUATIONS

Communicating the information gathered in the evaluation to the various stakeholders in the Policy Shaping Community has been done in a number of ways. Two Technical Reports (McNamara and Eisikovits, 1990; McNamara and Eisikovits, 1991) have been written for the benefit of the school governing and advisory bodies, as well as for the Government authorities who have funded the evaluation. These reports have been supplemented by conference and workshop presentations and academic publications for the academic community. In addition, separate reports have been written for the parents, with less technical detail and a clearer focus on features of interest to them. There have been regular briefing meetings with parents at which the teachers and members of the evaluation team have spoken and been available for questions; students themselves have attended such meetings as speakers and as listeners. An important aspect of the meetings with parents has been the soliciting from the parents, as important stakeholders, of their demands of the evaluation, that is, the kinds of things they would like the researchers to find out. In this way it is hoped that the evaluation process is a responsive process, and one capable of informing decision-making processes for all interested participants.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVALUATION FINDINGS TO DATE

In this paper, the analysis of contextual variables and the investigation of the outcomes of the program, either actual or potential, have been reported. We have provided little information on processes of implementation, although that is our intention in

subsequent papers. It is clear so far that the program should be counted a success in terms of academic outcomes, an unsurprising finding in view of the Canadian literature on immersion, but important and reassuring in this new context nonetheless. In what way, if any, is it possible to generalize from these findings? As stated above, it seems to us that there are limits on their generalizability. In experimental terms, there are too many uncontrolled variables. First, there are the particular teachers working in each program. Secondly, the children in the Comparison group are not in a single class, but are scattered over the other Year 7 classes. The general ability level of the Bilingual Class is high; it is a bright class (note the mean IQ in Table 1). A kind of streaming has taken place on the basis of volunteering for the program; a high-achieving class has its own dynamics in perhaps increasing the performance of all members of the class. The starting level of students in Hebrew proficiency was high, and initial high levels of language proficiency are a key to the success of late immersion programs, as the Canadian evaluations have shown. There is a danger that to the extent that the Mount Scopus program is a success, it may generate a bandwagon effect. We feel that it is important that our evaluation not be used in this way.

On the other hand, the program and its success are clearly of great interest and relevance to those in Government and elsewhere who are contemplating setting up other programs with similar or different age groups, in other settings. The fullest possible documentation of the Mount Scopus program and its outcomes is desirable as a record for others to read and learn from. The evaluation is thus relevant (and in that sense 'generalizable') to the extent that it is possible to learn from the experience of others.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The experience of Mount Scopus College over the past eighteen months suggests that Hebrew immersion, particularly commencing in or about Year 7, is an unusually promising method of language instruction. The bilingual program was introduced with,

admittedly, considerable forethought and planning, but it has proceeded with surprisingly few serious problems. The preliminary outcomes of the evaluation strongly suggest that students' Hebrew proficiency has progressed at a rate much faster than could have been achieved in any other way in the standard school program, at the same time as their general academic skills and subject-specific learning have developed virtually on a par with the attainments that could have been predicted for a group of students of comparable ability. In other words, the students in the Bilingual Class have made remarkable language gains, and yet they have apparently not had to pay any price for these gains, neither intellectually, emotionally, nor socially.

Other schools may wish to consider introducing Hebrew immersion in their own school communities on the basis of Mount Scopus' experience to date with its bilingual program. Teachers and administrators pondering the feasibility of immersion for their own schools may wish to take the following points into consideration:

1. Many Jewish schools are at a great advantage in relation to Hebrew immersion as compared with other schools in Canada and elsewhere that introduce immersion in any language. Typically, late-immersion programs in Canada cater for students who have studied much less of the target language than students in Jewish schools have studied Hebrew; in some cases, long-standing, well-reputed, and relatively successful Canadian late-immersion programs are open to students who have had no previous exposure to the language at all! By contrast, students in most Jewish schools have been studying Hebrew from an early age, and they already practice immersion in Hebrew on a limited basis by studying Tanach in Hebrew. The Canadian research on delayed and late immersion shows that, unsurprisingly, the longer and more intensively the students have been studying the

language in primary school before entering the immersion program, the more likely their success.

2. A bilingual program can be implemented only on a *voluntary* basis (Cohen and Swain, 1976). It is strongly recommended not to compel any students or parents to enter an immersion program unless they fully support their participation. For this reason, larger schools that have several classes at a year level may find it easier to introduce Hebrew immersion than smaller schools. Small schools may, however, wish to consider cross-age grouping of students in a bilingual class, a practice that has proven successful, for example, in a Japanese immersion school in Sydney.

3. Because immersion cannot simply be imposed on students and parents, the recruitment of students into a bilingual class must be carefully thought through and carried out. The full understanding and support of governing bodies is essential; the Education Committee of Mount Scopus looked at immersion from every angle over fifteen months before giving its tentative approval! Another very important factor in selling the idea is cooperation between the school and a local university. Linguistics departments tend to be very supportive, even enthusiastic, concerning language immersion, and it is very reassuring for parents to hear from acknowledged experts in the field, and not only from school personnel, that a proposed school program will benefit their child.

4. A further benefit of involving university personnel in Hebrew immersion is the support that they can provide in monitoring student progress and in

designing and carrying out a more sophisticated evaluation component than schools would otherwise have the time and expertise for. They are also available, once they are formally involved in the program, to offer in-service activities for immersion teachers on the principles and practices of language teaching in general, and immersion in particular. They may also agree to be on call for consultation with school personnel as new situations and unanticipated issues arise and need to be dealt with.

5. It is least disruptive to a school community to start up immersion in those subjects in which the expertise for teaching them in Hebrew is already present on staff. Having to hire teachers specifically for the program and then have them go through their own periods of adjustment introduces an additional source of potential instability; moreover, the staff who do *not* teach the Bilingual Class will be more likely to accept and support a program staffed by their own colleagues rather than by newly appointed strangers. Which subjects are taught in Hebrew hardly matters; the main point is to increase students' exposure to Hebrew and to make them use Hebrew as a means to a desired end - irrespective of the subjects in which this occurs.

6. Another related staffing consideration concerns the number of teachers involved in the program at any given time. In the case of Mount Scopus, it has appeared to be advantageous for students to be taught by as many as five immersion teachers per year. A group of teachers of this size constitutes a significant support group for each other, as well as offering a diverse range of language models on

which students can base their own language development. Appropriate immersion teachers can be found in the ranks of native Hebrew speakers, as well as among fluent speakers of Hebrew as a second language, provided, in either event, that they possess the appropriate subject-matter expertise. Many immersion programs suffer from students being exposed to one or, at most, two teachers who model the language for them, and they are constantly seeking ways of exposing their students to additional speakers of the target language as a means of enriching their versatility and flexibility in the language.

7. Finally, schools that decide to go ahead with Hebrew immersion would be well advised, in spite of the great successes of immersion programs elsewhere and their own high hopes for success, to caution potential participants - parents, teachers *and* students - that they are likely to experience difficulties in making the transition to the bilingual program, at least in the first half year. Not only is this true in some cases; it also helps to create a climate of tolerance for start-up problems as well as a feeling of particular pride, and even relief, when the problems that do arise are not as serious as had been anticipated or imagined.

CONCLUSION

The Mount Scopus bilingual program presents an interesting model, not only of language immersion and of its evaluation, but also of the collaboration between scholars and practitioners in innovative second-language learning projects that is so often advocated in the literature (e.g., Shapson, 1989; Handscombe, 1990). In particular, the decision of the school staff to involve applied linguists in the development and promotion of the

immersion program from the very outset, and the design of the evaluation on the part of the senior researchers so as to invite the input of the practitioners to make adjustments in response to their concerns, and to incorporate their interests, as well as those of each group of stakeholders in the research plan, have ensured that this program will be notable for its cooperation between schoolpeople and academics from start to finish.

While the ultimate outcomes of this innovation in language teaching cannot be predicted at this stage, the preliminary findings are promising, and the opportunities for further positive effects are considerable. Based on the successes registered to date in the students' language development and on the generally positive response to the program on the part of nearly all participants, teachers, students, researchers and parents alike, there is cause for optimism. To the extent that this optimism proves well-founded, it will be a tribute, among other things, to the carefully cultivated teamwork among the practitioners and researchers on the project team.

NOTES

[1] As evidence of the neglect of process, the famous book by Lambert and Tucker (1972) on the evaluation of the original St. Lambert programs relegates the matter to an Appendix:

> An important question immediately arises: What does the teacher actually do in a classroom when she speaks a language that is totally strange to the childen? Rather than describe in detail the texts, materials, lesson plans -which in most cases are standard - we felt it would be more instructive to describe classes in action as seen by an experienced teacher visiting the school for the first time. The teacher in question was Mme. Benoite Noble, who has taught some twenty years in France, England and Canada with both French- and English-speaking

> elementary age pupils. She visited each class from kindergarten to Grade V for two hours about a month after the beginning of the school year. Her insightful impressions are presented in Appendix B...
>
> (p. 26)

When we turn to Appendix B we find the following note (p. 237):

> 1 Observations made in early October 1971 by Mme. Benoite Noble... This was her first introduction to the school. The observations are based on visits of two hours in each class. Certain subject matters, such as mathematics and science, did not happen to be in progress during her visits.

2 The questionnaire is based on one used by Spolsky (1989).

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